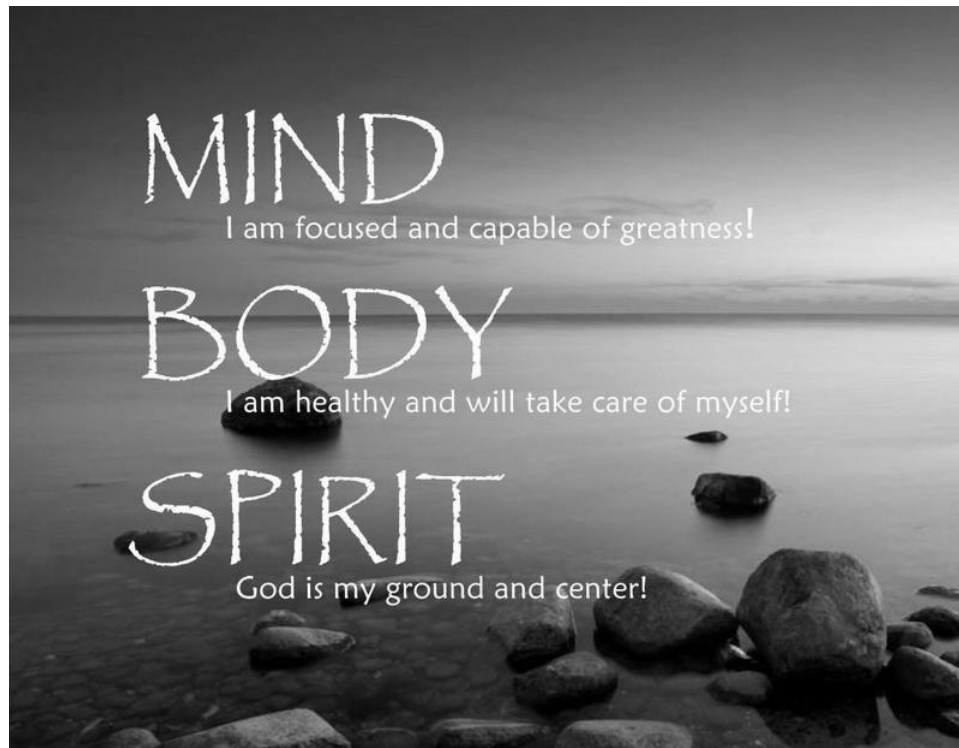


## THE SCIENCE OF BODY, MIND, AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH



*Scripture:*

**Psalm 32**

<sup>1</sup>Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. <sup>2</sup>Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup>While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

<sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

<sup>7</sup>You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

<sup>8</sup>I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. <sup>9</sup>Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

<sup>10</sup>Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. <sup>11</sup>Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

<sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



In honor of this being the season of Lent, I have a confession to begin with. I have been preaching and teaching about the Body, Mind and Spirit connection since I was first certified as a Parish Nurse in 1993. Much of the education in that certification course was on this topic, and I could just tap into some old sermons and repeat them. But I didn't do that for three reasons:

1. In the past I have not reflected upon these particular lectionary readings as they relate to the Body, Mind, and Spirit connection. So I have learned something new as I always do in researching for this sermon.
2. Also I have discovered that there is so much more knowledge today than there was on this topic in the past. The field of Body, Mind, and Spirit science has exploded!
3. It is always good to be reminded about new ways to help your body mind and spirit be in balance. (For instance the webpage where the bulletin cover photo was found says there is great benefit from starting your day with Self-Talk such as these three statements.

But first, let's look at the two lectionary scripture passages we read today: The first three verses of Psalm 32 addresses the body, mind, and spirit. I think it is fascinating to discover that, isn't it?

The mind is addressed with the mention of being "happy." "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity."

Then the spirit is mentioned directly where it says: "and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

And the body is said to have been wasting away when the author of this psalm (probably King David) was trying to keep silent and not confess his sin. He says, "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long."

### **KING DAVID**

King David had been trying to hide his sins from God and finally realized it was no use. He needed to fess up and ask for forgiveness for the sake of his health, both physically and spiritually. David severely felt the weight of guilt in his body, mind, and spirit. (Maybe he was getting an ulcer from the anxiety, had insomnia, indigestion, and his mind was obsessed with his guilt, making him depressed.

And when he was forgiven he felt the burden lift and felt happy, healthy, and relieved to know God loved him. So he rejoiced, shouted for joy, and trusted in God even more. All of this is a formula for healthy living. Confess your sins, be honest, don't try to be something you are not, and you will be healthier in body, mind, and spirit.

The body, mind, and spirit connection is found in the Psalms and Proverbs and in the narrative stories of the Bible as well.

### **PAUL**

Let's look at the New Testament reading for today in this 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians passage. This is Paul teaching the church in Corinth that they are an important part of God's handiwork. They are to become new creations so they can be ambassadors for God.

Remember Paul had a transformational experience on the road to Damascus. He was confronted by Jesus for persecuting Christians and was blinded. You can find the details in Acts 9:3-9 where Saul is transformed into Paul through a spiritual experience that affects both Paul's body and his mind!

Paul's eyes were blinded and for three days he went without eating or drinking. At the end of those three days, his whole body, mind, and spirit became a new creation! The old Saul was gone and the new Paul arose.

The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to become a whole new creation and then guided him on how to be the most famous evangelist that ever lived. He is credited with writing fourteen of the twenty seven books of the New Testament and was responsible for the great spread of early Christianity.

Today's passage is Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. Paul is talking about being reconciled to God, and becoming a new creation in order to be "the righteousness of God." Being the righteousness of God means to be as much like God in our actions as possible: loving, merciful, just, compassionate, and holy. All of these qualities are very healthy to possess. When you show these qualities you reflect God to the world. And even though the body, mind, and spirit are not directly mentioned, the connection is there. When you feel reconciled with God and empowered by God, you automatically feel strong in body, mind, and spirit.

### **BALANCE**

Most of us are aware of the connection between body, mind, and spirit, but now science and especially healthcare science is acknowledging the importance of having these three in balance.

"Mind, body and soul (or spirit) are like a musical ensemble. Each must be finely tuned and well nourished, diligently practiced and lovingly maintained in order to reach full potential.

The importance of this connection is demonstrated where hospitals are organizing whole departments and having big conferences on the importance of a balance in our body, mind, and spirit. Here is an ad for a Body, Mind, and Spirit Conference sponsored by a hospital on Long Island. It says,

**It is only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth, and we have no way of knowing when our time is up, that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it were the only one we had to live.**

Since your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, we all must take good care of God's temple.

### **THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUALITY ON HEALTH**

Dr. Harold Koenig at Duke University is one of the most prominent pioneers in this field of study. In the 1980's, David B. Larson, Jeff Levin, and Harold G. Koenig began studying the impact of spirituality on mental and physical health. Their work led to the establishment of Duke's Center for the Study of Religion, Spirituality and Health. It joined forces with Duke's Divinity School recently to form the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health. The focus of the new center is to conduct research, train researchers, create a dialogue between researchers and theologians, and to integrate spirituality into the clinical care of patients. Healthcare providers at Duke medical and nursing schools are taught to take a spiritual history of their patients and to pray with them if requested.

### **GERTRUDE BAINES**

Gertrude Baines is an example they cite. She lived to one-hundred-fifteen years old and was the world's oldest person prior to her death in 2009. Gertrude credited God for her long life. When asked why she'd lived so long, her response was, "Ask him!" She told CNN in 2006, "I took good care of myself, the way God wanted me to."

### **RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY**

Today, there is widespread agreement that RS (religious spirituality) helps patients cope with chronic or terminal illness. And the latest research is finding that the greatest health benefits come from their preventive power, preventing the onset of disease.

"There are now close to two-thousand quantitative, original studies that show that religious involvement is related to better health." Koenig's studies demonstrate that spirituality can affect physical outcomes like blood pressure, immune functioning, longevity, chronic illness, and effective use of health services. But this research is not limited to Duke University.

Dr Elizabeth Targ at California Pacific Medical Center did a series of trials looking at AIDS patients. Patients were randomized into two groups. One with standard care alone and the other got standard care plus a "booster." The booster was intercessory prayer at a distance.

This was a blind study which means neither group knew what the intervention or purpose of it was. In both a pilot study and a confirmation study, the group that received prayer at a distance (unknown to them) had statistically significant improvements in outcome. The "prayer from a distance" intervention made a significant difference in their health status.

### **FAITH AND MENTAL HEALTH**

The body, mind, and spirit connection is the main focus in his latest book, *Faith and Mental Health*. Dr. Koenig explains that there are more than eight-hundred-fifty studies measuring the relationship between spirituality and mental health. He found that those who had a supportive faith community and engaged in faith practices had a more optimistic view of the world and an improved quality of life.

In one study, researchers surveyed four-hundred-six patients with persistent mental illness at a Los Angeles County mental health facility. More than eighty percent indicated that they used religion to help them cope. The majority spent as much as half of their total "coping time" in prayer.

One man called Peter admitted that he was so engulfed in bitterness about his dual diagnosis of bipolar disorder and diabetes, that for nearly a decade he turned his back on his Christian faith. However, after he was rushed to the hospital for a collapsed lung, he received what he described as a "wake-up" call from his Spirit. Peter said the message was clear: If he wanted to move forward, he had to stop blaming God for everything that ailed him.

**Now Peter considers his weekly Bible Study Group as an important source of support. He said, "Things just happen in life and you have to learn how to deal with them. One of the best resources in dealing with them is your spirituality,"**

### **SPIRITUALITY IS GOOG FOR YOUR HEALTH**

As a result of all the scientific evidence for promoting spiritual health, a recent study found an increase in the number of health professionals who appreciate spirituality as a resource for promoting healing. More doctors and nurses in hospital settings are discussing spirituality with their patients to encourage them to tap in to all the resources available to them.

In Jeffrey Kluger's article, *The Biology of Belief*, he reported that, science and religion argue all the time, but they increasingly agree on one thing: spirituality is very good for your health. He describes study results that show the nuances of faith as well, such as, "people who believe in a loving God fare better after a diagnosis of illness than people who believe in a punitive God."

Some of the science behind body, mind, and spiritual health suggests that you may live longer if you go to church because you're there for the blood pressure screening, and the other parish nurse services. In addition, while in church your viral load goes down because your levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, goes down, giving your immune system functioning a boost.

A study of the health of regular churchgoers found that over an eight year period, those who never attended religious services had twice the risk of dying compared to people who attended once a week.

Even a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, Ted Kaptchuk, teaches his med students that "Religious belief is not just a mind question but involves the commitment of one's body. The sensory organs, tastes, smells, sounds, music, the architecture of religious buildings are all involved in the faith experience." The act of walking into a house of worship can prime the brain for healing in body, mind, and spirit.

### **WEATHERING ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS**

Neal Krause, a sociologist and public-health expert at the University of Michigan, has focused particularly on how regular churchgoers weather economic downturns as well as the stresses and health woes that go along with them.

Not surprisingly, he found that church attendees benefit when they receive social support from their church. But he has also found that those people who give help fare even better than those who receive it.

There is significant evidence that people who believe their lives have meaning live longer than people who don't. "That's one of the purported reasons for religion." Krause believes church doors should all have signs that say, 'Come in here and you'll find meaning.'

Science is now overwhelmingly showing that we must keep our bodies, minds, and spirits in balance to have health and peace in our souls. It is never too late to start.

Let's look back at the illustration under the sermon title. Your day can begin in balance when you speak positive thoughts to yourself. First, for your mind, "I am focused and capable of greatness!"

This doesn't have to be earth-shattering greatness. Your road to greatness can be paved with doing small things with great love, as Mother Teresa prescribed.

For your body you can tell yourself, "I am healthy and will take care of myself." Healthy is a relative term. When you are striving to be healthy, you tend to care for yourself better even if the level of health you can get to is not the same as the level of health others can achieve. You are not to compare yourself to others. Just try to be as healthy as you can. Eat wisely, exercise, breathe deeply, laugh, pray, and love yourself and others.

And for your spirit, remind yourself that "God is my ground and my center." God is waiting for you to communicate and get closer every day. Pray to remind yourself that you are a beloved child of God and that all you are and all you have and all you do is for the

purpose of bringing glory to God. Then your heart is grateful for God's blessings. Your attitude of gratitude invigorates your immune system and gives your spirit a boost as you start your day. Keep this illustration by your bed so you can remember to say this self-talk when you wake up each day.

You have some very capable nurses and doctors here in this congregation who can help you figure out other ways to help you have body, mind, and spiritual harmony. If they didn't believe in body, mind, and spiritual harmony they would not be here today.

Thanks be to God for the resources we are blessed with here in our church and nation. Now let's sing and have communion, and pray, and then we will be even more energized to go out and be healthy ambassadors for God. Amen

### **Benediction:**

**There is an ancient Indian Proverb that reflects on the body, mind, and spirit. It basically says, "Everyone is a house with three rooms: a physical, a mental, and a spiritual. Most of us tend to live in just one room most of the time, but unless we go into every room every day, even if only to keep it aired, we are not a complete person."**

**Practicing faith, hope, and love is a simple formula for your body, mind, and spiritual health. May you take care of all three for the sake of bringing glory to God every day of your life.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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